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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines
Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: *review_editor@platypus1917.org*. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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The Platypus Review

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The Left is not a concept

Benedict Cryptofash

OVER THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF, I have been developing a seemingly paradoxical theory of anti-leftist Marxism in an effort to explain how the Left enforces bourgeois class domination. Refined in dialogue with a handful of fellow travelers on social media and now through an ongoing series of articles, anti-leftist Marxism rejects the conventional association between Marx and the Left, arguing instead that the former provides the critical resources for revealing the latter's role as the leading ideological force of capitalist society today. Even for many invested in what they thought were leftist principles, this situation has become increasingly difficult to deny, as they have watched the Left spearhead every bourgeois ideological campaign in recent memory. From the endless liberal panics around fascism, racism, sexism, and domestic terrorism to COVID-19 vaccine fanaticism, whatever the latest mental production of bourgeois society might be, one can be sure that it is being achieved by its foot soldiers in academia, media, tech, activism, the arts, i.e., the ideological factories of the Left.

My critique of the Left as nothing but the left wing of bourgeois democracy has brought me into contact with the Platypus Affiliated Society, which is similarly critical of the pseudo-radical contemporary Left. But whereas Platypus conceives of itself as a project for "the practical reconstitution of a Marxian Left," I contend that, as merely one side of bourgeois politics, the Left is anti-Marxist to begin with, and efforts to "reconstitute a Marxian Left." Kotakowski's conception of the Left as a philosophical abstraction that holds a moral and ideological essence is the common premise of many leftist true-believers, who set their ideal of the Left against the contaminations of the actual Left, convinced that the latter only needs purification to enter the true light of the former. Indeed, a central excuse that keeps many critics of class society tethered to the Left, despite its recurring submission to bourgeois imperatives, is the Kotakowskian belief in an ideal conception of the Left worth saving, the dream of a "real" Left that transcends the existing one.

Anti-leftist Marxism overturns this mystical consciousness of pure leftism by interpreting the Left not as a romantic ideal but in terms of its actual historical existence, as one side of the Left/Right political organization of capitalist society, the artificial division of bourgeois democracy which the Left is historically responsible for promoting at the expense of the Marxist centrality of class struggle. In other words, the Left is not a shell of its former proletarian self, nor has its corruptions removed it from the grace of pure leftism. Instead, the Left has always embodied the parliamentary logic of the capitalist state it exists to naturalize. The Left came into being as the left wing of bourgeois democracy and as its long history as the advance guard of liberal capitalism reveals, its interests are not identical with those of the proletariat, something Kotakowski is proud to emphasize. In short, the Left is not a concept. It is the historical movement of the progressive bourgeoisie. In the contemporary United States, it is the Democratic Party.

In a 2014 Platypus panel devoted to Kotakowski's "The Concept of the Left," Chris Cutrone observes that its author only "became a very virulent anti-Marxist" much later, after the composition of this essay in the late fifties when he was "still writing within the tradition of Marxism."[3] I argue, however, that in its own way Kotakowski's essay is itself a pernicious work of anti-Marxist utopianism that epitomizes the kind of leftist metaphysics that keeps today's quixotic Left-reformers tethered to the concept of the Left despite its practical existence. I contend that Kotakowski's misconception about the Left stems from his desire to imbue it with an essence, to romanticize it as a utopian "ideal born in the realm of pure spirit and not in current historical experience."[4] In his attempts to define the Left as a philosophical abstraction "on the level of ideas," in "intellectual, and not class, terms," he only shrouds its real social function in the abstractions that historical materialism emerged to demystify.[5]

Although at one point Kotakowski concedes that "the concept of the Left is relative," that "one is a leftist only in comparison with something, and not in absolute terms," he nevertheless spends most of his essay contrasting the essence of the Left with the essence of the Right, a relation that, for him, forms a transhistorical dynamic.[6] Indeed, Kotakowski often appears to eternalize the Left, claiming that "its unchangeable and indispensable quality [...] is a movement of negation toward the existent world."[7] In Kotakowski's moral drama, the Left is the "quest for change" striving for utopian impossibilities that "lie beyond the foreseeable future and defy planning."[8] By contrast, Kotakowski sees the Right "as a conservative force," whose "essence is the affirmation of existing conditions."[9] Whereas Kotakowski's Left represents the transformation of reality, the Right "strives to idealize actual conditions, not to change them."[10] Therefore, unlike the Left, "What it needs is fraud, not utopia," the latter being what the Left gives forth "just as the princess discharges insulin — by virtue of an innate law."[11]

This romantic leftism paints a simplistic moral dualism in which the Left is the "dynamite of hope that blasts the dead load of ossified systems, institutions, customs, intellectual habits, and closed doctrine" represented by the historical inertia of the Right.[12] As Platypus panelist Nikos Mallilaris's observes, "Kotakowski has a tendency to reduce Left and right to abstract philosophical concepts, and then to identify the Left as 'Good' compared to the right as 'Evil.'"[13] Such sanctimony may please the moralistic leftists of the Democratic Party, whose partisans never tire of demonizing the Right as the source of all evil. But Kotakowski's Left/Right metaphysics have nothing to do with Marx, who never oriented his thought according to this moral binary and only opposed such idealistic frameworks. Furthermore, it is at odds with history itself, in which the Left has more often worked "to idealize actual conditions, not to change them," the very tendency that Kotakowski considers to be the essence of the Right. Consider, for example, the utopian socialism Marx insists the proletariat must abandon to the petty bourgeoisie, for with "great sentimental rhetoric" it "only idealises present-day society, makes a shadowless picture of it and seeks to oppose its ideal to its reality."[14] The utopian Left Marx critiqued in his time is after all not very different from the bourgeois socialists of today, who as the ideological shock troops of the Democratic Party, function "to perpetuate things as they are" as much as anyone on the Right.[15]

The original leftists of the revolutionary bourgeois may have negated feudal society, in keeping with Kotakowski negative essence of the Left, yet as one side of emerging bourgeois democracy, the Left/Right polarization they created fundamentally affirms the parliamentary logic of the existing capitalist order. Although Kotakowski presents Left and Right as eternal moral opposites, "both terms originate in the debates that shook revolutionary France back in the 1790s." As Mallilaris details, "They express the mounting forms: the Left a radical one, and the right its more moderate counterpart," the latter being "a moderate way to support the post-revolutionary order."[16] From a Marxist perspective, therefore, Left and Right are not opposites; they are relative tendencies within the ruling class, the advance and rear guards of liberal capitalism.

Kotakowski contrasts the Left as revolutionary negation and the Right as reactionary affirmation by claiming, "The opposite of blowing up a house is not to build a new house but to retain the existing one," but ever since bourgeois revolution blew up the *ancien régime*, both Right and Left have combined to preserve the existing house of capitalist society.[17] In short, it is a mystification of history to claim that capitalism is inherently right wing, for the Left is the political force that ushered capitalism into the world and it is the Left that continues to take credit for the "liberating" effects of the advancing bourgeois epoch.

Proletarian Marxism rejects the intra-bourgeois Left/Right divide because it only obscures the class nature of social antagonisms with its idealistic framework of competing values and "moral attitudes." Perhaps the most anti-Marxist aspect of Kotakowski's essay is indeed the way it submerges the real social contradiction between classes into a moral and metaphysical opposition between the abstractions of Right and Left. At odds with Marx's method of historical materialism, Kotakowski insists that "the Left must be defined in intellectual, and not class, terms," and embraces the discrepancy between the proletariat as a social class and the Left "as a certain ideological and moral attitude" that transcends class interests.[18] While many leftists seek to retain an illusion of proletarian politics by equating the ruling class with the Right and the working class with the Left, Kotakowski is more transparent when explaining "why the statement that it must be in the interest of the working class to belong to the Left does not always hold true."[19] This is because "the Left must define itself on the level of ideas," which for Kotakowski include "change," "hope," "the destruction of all racism," and "the abolition of inequalities, discrimination, and the exploitation of certain countries by others."[20] Few leftists (i.e., Democrats) today would disagree.

The Left/Right mystification of class struggle is as antithetical to the thought of Marx as it is useful to bourgeois interests, yet it is the Left that creates and perpetuates this superficial dichotomy. "The Left draws the dividing line between the Left and the Right, while the Right fights this division systematically — and in vain, for the Left's self-definition," as Kotakowski celebrates, "is strong enough to define the Right and, in any event, to establish the existence of the Right that continues to take credit for the 'liberating'

What can one learn from the Right?

D. L. Jacobs

I REMEMBER TALKING TO AN ANARCHIST in 2016 about Platypus; they were irate that we had published an anti-Deutsch communist in 2010.[1] He claimed that Platypus was like CNN, in that we would host people with different views on a panel in order to suggest that the middle position is the best. I said, no, we host the conversation among the Left, and the Left itself takes contradictory stances on an issue as a result of their shared history. I said, for example, we wouldn't put someone from the John Birch Society on a panel. He then said, "But what if the John Birch Society said it was Leftist?" I responded, "Could the John Birch Society say it was Leftist?"

Platypus's interest in the Left follows from how the Left bears the failure of the proletarian socialist revolution — and really the memory of Utopia — when it reaches for the history of the Left to justify its practices today. The Right doesn't have this history because it did not try to lead and emancipate the world; it doesn't relate to these past practices as having anything to do with it. This does not preclude the Right from holding values, such as liberty or cosmopolitanism, that the historical Left had upheld, but this means they can only serve as a foil, a reminder. For example, Marx told his followers that their internationalism was "even infinitely below that of the Free Trade party."[2] But what one learns from the Right today is primarily how an opportunity was missed — it is purely negative.

To call the Left the vanguard of regression then, would only raise the question of "whether and how the revolutionary tradition is still within the counterrevolution."[3] For progressives are not the mere opposite of conservatives but rather "more cunning conservatives,"[4] a problem seen already by the early Marx.[5] They provide different ways of adapting to the historical process, and they will continue to lag and adapt so long as this process rushes forward unconsciously. Capitalism was both the revolution and counterrevolution, but in an opaque form that prevented both the conservative and progressive tendencies from realizing themselves.[6] For both a conservative and progressive character will be met by a proletarian socialist revolution: a return to the foundation of bourgeois society, even a regression of sorts,[7] in order to realize bourgeois right, but under changed conditions that point beyond the horizon of bourgeois society.[9]

Part of what entices people to pick either the Democrats or Republicans is that they can differ significantly on policies they propose and the justifications they give — but what is left out is the *how*: in other words, people confuse policies for politics. First, why are there capitalist parties? "Every political party, even of the extreme Right, has to seek some sort of link with the people."[10] Lenin said this with respect to the Black Hundreds, a proto-fascist "party of the landowners," who could not base themselves on rentiers alone, but had to appeal to the masses of people. Capital has conquered neo-reactionary forms — in 1848, the royalists all became republicans[11] — and the reaction responded in turn, by adopting the socialist critique of modern industry.[12] This creates a contradiction: the basis for transmitting traditional culture is the same basis protested by reaction[13] and even the lamentations of the decline of civilization bear the mark of modern society, as Wilhelm Reich has noted.[14] Mussolini was aware of the impossibility of returning to pre-bourgeois society.[15] When Marx said that "revolutions are locomotives of history," he was talking about how the proletariat had forced a question of politics (in particular universal suffrage), onto the masses of society.[16] They introduced a runaway train. What makes the parties capitalist, then, is not the policy, but the social crisis that they adapt people to — really, how they do it. But this also explains why even the far Right can have an interest in liberal, democratic institutions. The Black Hundreds and Octobrists frequently defended the existence of the Duma[17] and progressive economic policies.[18] It should therefore be no surprise that even self-avowed right-wing groups may represent "not only reactionary but also powerful progressive social forces."[19] Indeed, Lenin notes that "[s]uch a game cannot be played without risk. Now and again the voice of the real peasant life, peasant democracy, breaks through all the Black Hundred mustiness and cliché."[20]

The bursting asunder of bourgeois social relations is experienced as an *injustice*. It evokes a sense of bourgeois society not yet achieved, when in fact it is outstripped; the overflowing of industrial potential causes it to fall below bourgeois society as it tries to adapt to the mayhem. As Chris Cutrone has pointed out, "[b]oth the neoliberals and neoconservatives seek to further the revolution — capitalism — but do so through what Marxists must consider the counterrevolution."[21] The obsolescence of society makes it seem both oppressively bourgeois and not bourgeois enough. The reason why the Right wing often recaptures part of the task of the proletariat is because the defense of society itself has become contradictory. Engels told Bebel that "the whole collective reaction...will group itself around pure democracy," in a moment of crisis and make "the most extreme revolutionary gestures."[22] This is because they will see their actions as saving the same Republic that the Left will also claim — Louis Bonaparte lead a revolution to save property, order and liberal institutions. Luxemburg's point that the army becomes "an independent 'pressure group' of its own"[23] is because the need to continually preserve the potential for a political revolution in order to save capitalism. A Bonapartist revolution will look "like the beginning of economic and social expropriation,"[24] but it will be done to save the capitalists from themselves — that is, unconsciously. This was not the only possibility for Marx, but rather reflected that it was when the proletariat could not yet rule and the bourgeoisie could no longer rule. The hope would be that an organized class party, going into this situation, would be able to bring "revolutionary tactics to a majority"[25] who may be opposed to the proletariat at the outset.[26] Thus, Luxemburg could note that "even where the counter-revolution still seems to rule, we [Marxists] have adherents and future comrades-in-arms."[27]

What do capitalist parties do? They squander the potential of socialism. This does not follow from what is done but rather who is going to do it and how. Even when Bismarck proposed an unobjectionable legislative bill, the German SPD would "[introduce] amendments or parallel bills, giving themselves the opportunity to accept the principle of Bismarck's legislation and also specific reasons for voting against it."[28] That is, they sought to preserve the possibility and necessity of their political leadership — that was priority number one behind their fight for independence from the State. For Bonapartism is not "suspended in the air," but rather must lead a democratic revolution to stay in power; society demands that the State conquer it, as the State is the "admission that this society has involved itself in insoluble self-contradiction and is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to exorcise."[29] The State will continue to extend because bourgeois social relations have shown themselves to be incapable of preserving and developing the productive forces they engender on their own.[30] "Factory legislation [is] [...] just as much the necessary product of modern industry as cotton yarn, self-actors, and the electric telegraph,"[31] because a political, coercive act has become a condition of bourgeois production. The State continues the socialization process while trying to maintain bourgeois social relations — thus, it is experienced both as an intrusion and as "progressive." Libertarianism is a symptomatic reaction to this: Gustav Molinari's *The Production of Security*, which was called by Murray Rothbard the "first presentation anywhere in human history of what is now called anarcho-capitalism," was written partially in response to the events of 1848.[32] Molinari proposed extending civil society to the last remaining monopoly, that of force. The famous Libertarian slogan "Taxation is Theft!" is both an appeal to the bourgeois ideal of property in labor[33] and also falls below the bourgeois recognition of the State as the final guarantor of right.[34] Libertarians both hold the Lockean homesteading principle[35] and yet deny its continued existence in exchange — a perfect expression of commodity fetishism.[36] For the State has become integral to the reproduction of civil society in a way that was not expected nor desired by bourgeois radicals, but this means that programs of "rolling back the state" cannot be done in a non-contradictory fashion. In fact, let it be remembered that the New Left had converged with the New Right on this issue: Bill Ayers and Milton Friedman both supported charter schools,[37] and the Black Panthers demanded community control against public education.[38] Rendering the state superfluous through civil-social action was the program of both Peter Kropotkin[39] and Eduard Bernstein,[40] but such a view had to treat the State as coming from without: from this logic, the rolling back of the State is identical then with making society more cooperative and attaining the bourgeois ideal.

The Marxist critique then, was not one of trying to blindly role back nor affirm the extension of the State, but to recognize the necessity of the State, its contradictory action and the potential of this for a proletarian revolution. This was how Lenin could simultaneously read the nationalization of industries by the State and yet, the inability of the Imperialist State to solve the fundamental problems of the bourgeois revolution as necessitating a dictatorship of the proletariat.[41] The point was to make the perfection of the state a part of the history of the socialist revolution, such that the whole world would come together to say: "well burrowed, old mole!"[42] That's the real meaning of the phrase "Imperial Socialism"–it was a critical category, expressing the continued failure of socialism, but also the preservation of its possibility.[43]

There is nothing wrong with a socialist party running on the drawback of state intervention, but the question we are trying to ask here is, what does this mean in the absence of a socialist party? Here's a recent example: last year, during the George Floyd protests, there was floated the idea of defunding and/or abolishing the police.[44] This would be a huge rollback of the State, and yet it is not hard to imagine that rather than overcoming the intrusive police bureaucracy, it would privatize it, making it less accountable, more opaque and more intolerable. In other words, it avoids the task that the State represents. Lenin noted that the "frenzied petty bourgeoisie" may want to see the State "smashed" and "blown up," but what separated the proletariat from the petty bourgeoisie was that the former also recognize the task of reorganizing the executive and completing even the intervention of the State into civil society.[45] For if the frenzied petty bourgeoisie got their way, "we would get the return to the old free enterprise system, [and] the entire horror would start again from the beginning under new management."[46] Socialism is likely to be more political, and from a classical liberal standpoint, may look even more wrong. It is hard to prepare people for that task if one adopts a libertarian perspective that the State is merely a gang. But that's the dialectic: only the "strictest control by society and by the state over the measure of labour and the measure of consumption" could actually lead to the overcoming the State. The reason why Marxists would say this point upfront is because this end, the abolition of the State, gives the content to the political activity of conquering State power. The State as it exists today is not going to politicize itself as a class dictatorship — that would be political suicide. The question of more or less State, of Bakunin or Lassalle, in that sense, is the wrong question.

This gives an insight into why the history of the Left, rather than that of the Right, is crucial for grasping the present. In the modern era, many conservative commentators have characterized the present as uniquely oppressive because of the extant of finance, monopoly, or bureaucracy.[47] This analysis seems to at least partially borrow from the Marxist distinction between earlier "free-market" capitalism and latter imperialism. But Engels had already written in his youth that "free-trade must produce the restoration of monopolies on the one hand and the abolition of private property on the other." What had changed then from Marx's time to Lenin's? In his critique of Rosa Luxemburg's "Junius Pamphlet," Lenin wrote: "The chief defect in Junius' pamphlet [...] is its silence regarding the connection between social-chauvinism [...] and opportunism [...] for it is impossible to explain the 'betrayal' without linking it up with opportunism as a trend with a long history, the history of the whole Second International."[48]

This was also clearer for the New Left, at one time, perhaps due to their rebellion as red diaper babies. André Gorz was able to link the technocracy of his time to this preceding socialist history, but also to note why it was a problem that could not be abandoned to mere anti-bureaucracy:

> To the degree to which the incompetence of the labor movement and the absence of a coherent anticapitalist perspective are real, technocracy will thus deploy its forces with the aim of attracting into its camp and integrating into the institutions of the capitalist State all the labor organizations which are susceptible to such a maneuver without, however, destroying the labor movement as a "loyal" opposition (or "countervailing power") to the power of monopoly capital. If, on the other hand, the labor movement does not retreat into a defensive position but instead begins vigorously to work out an anticapitalist alternative with strategically scaled and economically coherent objectives, then it will destroy the ideology which justifies technocracy; it will force technocracy to choose between the monopolies and the working-class movement, and will win over more than a negligible portion of this "caste" to its side. This will be the case not only because the socialist movement can no longer appear to the technocrats as a simple protest movement, capable of destroying the apparatus of production but not of managing it for other ends; but also because a minority among the technocrats work for monopoly capital not out of conviction but because they find no other outlet for their competence, because they believe they can follow a policy of the "lesser evil," and because they see no real road to socialism. These technocrats are in the same position of that vast sector of lower- and middle-class groups who "sympathize" with socialism but are in practice skeptical. They will not make a choice until they can see intermediate objectives, that is, mediations, which will make them see socialism not as something beyond the present society, separated from it by an unbreachable wall, but like the real horizon of the internal exigencies of this society — as a horizon toward which the progression of realizable intermediate objectives indicates a practicable way. Only the possibility of such a way will force this vague mass of "sympathizers" to make a choice in which in the recent past it has all too often been spared.[49]

For the issue is not trusts, which no Marxists would want to do away with,[50] nor the bureaucracy, which is really a pejorative term for a rational use of the division of labor,[51] but the problem is rather how it is politically organized. For example, Woodrow Wilson saw his progressive program as restoring the independence lost since Jefferson's time[52] and argued that public administration should be "unpartisan" and "businesslike."[53] One can fixate on the candor of Wilson's statements all one wants, but the point of a Marxist critique of Wilson would be that progressivism maintains such dependence despite its intention; for it remains at the level of a horizon superseded, that keeps people in dependence on the State. Debs agreed with Wilson's view that conditions had changed and had created a greater dependence since Jefferson's time,[54] but he saw this as demanding proletarian socialism, for the proletariat itself to take responsibility for the socialization of society. "A drowning man clutches at any straw, nor can he wait for a boat to push off from the bank and come to his rescue," Engels once said to Bernstein. "The boat is socialist revolution, the straw, protective tariffs and state socialism."[55] Don't be surprised if people reach for the state. Even Ayn Rand took social security. A practical alternative is needed for people to tread water.

In other words, the existence of the technocratic "class" is a failure on the part of socialist politics, and it has its roots in the Left. This also means the rancor towards the PMC today threatens to repeat a mistake of the New Left, which also hated the bureaucracy. Really, it is not even a class in the Marxist sense, and such a designation falls into crude empiricism. For example, the originator of the term Professional Managerial Class, Barbara Ehrenreich, described herself as a member of the PMC recently because she has a PhD,[56] but such admission only confuses the question of class even further. In fact, Trotsky had critiqued his former followers precisely because they had called the Soviet bureaucracy a new "class": that would imply that as the bourgeoisie had brought us property in labor, a new kind of property had been created by the managerial "class." The problem of capitalism was not that a new property had been created but rather the "reactionary role" that property itself had come to play to the forces it had engendered,[57] and the bureaucracy that is brought forth to manage society. They thus separated and mangled the question from its essential political component.[58] Regardless of the origin of the concept, the function of the concept of the PMC today is more about expressing anger with the ruling clique of the Democratic Party. DSA members Dustin Guastella and Jared Abbot characterize the major cleavage of our time as "between downwardly mobile working-class Americans and members of the professional and middle classes."[59] They relate this divergence to the Democratic Party abandoning "its New Deal-era commitment" in favor of the policies of the PMC. This has also taken on an appearance of culture vs economics, giving the Right, which rejects Political Correctness and has certainly tacked towards more economic demands, a sense of capturing the Old Left. The criticism is straightforward: the Left needs to become normal and give up on this eccentric subculture. They are alienating their own base with their intersectional theory. Amber Frost wrote an article in 2015 describing the Left Forum as "an absolute shitshow of nerds and social rejects," blaming these "marginalistas [who] distract, disrupt and deter future comrades."[60] There is a point to what she was saying: a reborn Left would appeal to common sense and have to at least be considered normal. But what makes the Democrats and Republicans normal, except for the fact that they constitute the historically accepted horizon of politics? One of the reasons why Platypus only makes sense doing the reading group, coffee breaks, and panels (and relating them together) is because one has to familiarize oneself with the thought that these Left groups, even the crankiest ones, channel. This is why a formerly rational view can appear irrational, but it is also why we cannot merely appeal to what is considered normal; that has to be politically achieved by making socialism a realistic possibility. A changed political horizon would change what was considered normal, but a mass socialist party would contain many subcultures that currently slander each other. Nearly 50 years ago, Penn Kemble had described the New Politics of the Democrats (McGovern-Fraser Commission) as differing from the old New-Deal coalition only in that they refused "to acknowledge the degree to which it hungers for political power and patronage."[61] The New Democrats had also criticized the "old" politicians who devised and administered the election procedures [as] also [being] partisans for a particular side."[62] History doesn't repeat, but it rhymes. We should be careful not to repeat the worst parts of the New Left, which used concepts like "labor aristocracy" in order to trap themselves. The Left's past activity confronts it now in a reified manner. In order to truly understand the object, the bureaucracy, the all-around character must be grasped: not just what it is but what it could be; not just which of Burnham or Hobson's predictions came true but how they are marked by a missed opportunity.

In 2016, both sides accused their own side of being conservative. Boris Kagerlitsky called out leftist intellectuals for being the final defenders of neoliberalism;[63] likewise, Michael Anton accused conservatives of contradicting conservatism by "[holding] conservative cultural, economic, and political beliefs [...] and yet also [believing] that things can go on more or less the way they are going."[64]

This is important because it characterizes the role that Trump played for me during his tenure. As he put it in his 2017 campaign book: "The career politicians love to talk about having a nation-wide 'E-verify system' [...] But let's not kid ourselves. Our 'leaders' must lead on this, and engage with foreign governments to stop illegal immigration, and not simply impose something on our businesses and think that some Internet verification system alone will solve the problem."

That, to me, was the real value of Trump. For once in my life, someone was trying to politically lead. It had nothing to do with the policies (I am not for E-verify). Trump showed that it was still possible to politicize people and to run against the major capitalist parties.

This is what it means to say that the Right serves as a foil for the Left: they reflect parts of the Left's history that the Left has forgotten; but that is because the Right is only about tactics. The Right is still as constituted by the failure of the Left as the Left is, but they treat it as something that comes from without — the New Right is very much also a product of the New Left.[65] The value of Trump was that he allowed the self-inhibitory character of the Left to come to the surface, because he proposed things frequently associated with the Left. This was the spirit of Chris Cutrone's "Why Not Trump?" The article begins by listing various things about Trump frequently associated with the Left. Chris would later lament that perhaps this statement was too "philosophical."[66] For what was revealed in the hysteria around the article was an undigested practice of tailing the Democrats. Hence, Brendan Cooney accused Chris Cutrone of taking an "elitist attitude to the anti-Trump resistance" and instead being led to "pander to the white-nationalist, misogynist Trump base, trying to buy them off with economic populism."[67] Elias Friedman, somewhat inspired also by Chris's 2018 "Why I wish Hillary Won," responded to Chris by suggesting that if Biden won, the Democrats would be "less able to hide," and this would give an opportunity to push people out of the Democrats.[68] So far this has just meant further depoliticization; indeed, Trump made the Left more exciting.

In the same way that "Capitalism is its own practical critique,"[69] the Left moves through its own self-critique; but this self-critique is also a means of adaption. It becomes a "tendency to turn rapidly into submission, apathy, phantasms, and even a frenzied infatuation with one bourgeois fad or another."[70] The Right will just say, "Marxism failed. Of course — in fact, don't you know a socialist economy is impossible? It is a Utopia."[71]

But being anti-Utopian does not reward someone with the conscience that they are reasonable. For Reason is most Reasonable when it is at variance with the given-when it is Utopian. Kołakowski said that "[the] Left gives forth Utopias just as the pancreas discharges insulin" — this is enough to condemn what calls itself the Left today as long past dead. My initial attraction to the Right was to the parts that seemed most Utopian: the miniarchism of Nozick, the anarcho-capitalism of Rothbard. The libertarians, too, have recognized the Left's regression on this part: Friedrich Hayek noted in the 1950's that the earlier era of "hot socialism," that aimed at the transformation of the world, had been supplanted by welfare statism.[72] Even today, the Right will point out that what is understood by Millennials as Marxism, is really either welfarism,[73] transferism,[74] or just completely unrelated to Marx's thought.[75] But most importantly, the modern libertarian strategy is an adaptation of New Left Marxism-Leninism. As Rothbard put it, "[o]f all the movements for radical social change in modern history, the most self-conscious and the one that has devoted the most thought to the problems of strategy has been the Marxist-Leninist movement."[76] While in the Peace and Freedom Party, Rothbard encouraged fellow socialists to follow the "libertarian strand" of socialism of Marx, Bakunin and Lenin as opposed to the "right-wing" strand of Saint-Simon.[77] He undertook a lengthy study of Lenin during this period, appropriating such terms as "right opportunism" and "left sectarianism," with the goal of building up libertarian cadre to tap into the anti-state distrust of right-wing populism.[78] This strategy is clearly not that different than that of Rothbard's fellow Party members, Elridge Cleaver and Bob Avakian. The point of this is to say that the legacy of the failure of the Left weighs on all politics and is not something that can be avoided by jumping ship to self-avowed right-wing discontents. You are going to have to face it, hopefully with sober senses. If the Left is to learn anything from the Right, it ought to at least meet the Right in its own Utopianism. "If the Left is to change the world, it must first transform itself!"[79] **|P**

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[1] Initiative Sozialistisches Forum, "Communism and Israel," *Platypus Review* 28 (October 2010), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2010/10/08/communism-and-israel/>.

[2] Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program" (1875), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm>.

[3] Chris Cutrone, "1918–2018: The century of counterrevolution," *Platypus Review* 106 (May 2018), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2018/05/04/1918-2018-the-century-of-counterrevolution/>.

[4] Chris Cutrone, "The end of the Gilded Age: Discontents of the Second Industrial Revolution today," *Platypus Review* 102 (Dec 2017 – Jan 2018), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2017/12/02/end-gilded-age-discontents-second-industrial-revolution-today/>.

[5] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (1845), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>. Marx and Engels wrote, "The Young-Hegelian ideologists, in spite of their allegedly 'world-shattering' statements, are the staunchest conservatives. The most recent of them have found the correct expression for their activity when they declare they are only fighting against 'phrases.' They forget, however, that to these phrases they themselves are only opposing other phrases, and that they are in no way combating the real existing world when they are merely combating the phrases of this world. The only results which this philosophic criticism could achieve were a few (and at that thoroughly one-sided) elucidations of Christianity from the point of view of religious history; all the rest of their assertions are only further embellishments of their claim to have furnished, in these unimportant elucidations, discoveries of universal importance."

[6] Chris Cutrone, Samir Gandesha, Nikos Malliaris, Dimitrios Roussopoulos, Joseph Schwartz, "Revolutionary politics and thought," *Platypus Review* 69 (September 2014), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2014/09/05/revolutionary-politics-thought-2/>. Cutrone said, "For capitalism is the revolution, however it is also the counterrevolution. Both the neoliberals and neoconservatives seek to further the revolution—capitalism—but do so through what Marxists must consider the counterrevolution."

[7] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/comm.htm>. Marx wrote, "Crude communism is only the culmination of this envy and of this levelling-down proceeding from the preconceived minimum. It has a definite, limited standard. How little this annulment of private property is really an appropriation is in fact proved by the abstract negation of the entire world of culture and civilisation, the regression to the unnatural simplicity of the poor and crude man who has few needs and who has not only failed to go beyond private property, but has not yet even reached it."

[8] Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme" (1875). Marx wrote, "Hence, equal right here is still in principle – bourgeois right, although principle and practice are no longer at loggerheads, while the exchange of equivalents in commodity exchange exists only on the average and not in the individual case. In spite of this advance, this equal right is still constantly stigmatized by a bourgeois limitation. The right of the producers is proportional to the labor they supply; the equality consists in the fact that measurement is made with an equal standard, labor...But these defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society. Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby. In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!"

[9] Ferdinand Lassalle to Karl Marx (December 12, 1851), cited in Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/Lukács/works/history/hcc07_5.htm>. Lassalle wrote, "Hegel used to say in his old age that directly before the emergence of something qualitatively new, the old state of affairs gathers itself up into its original, purely general, essence, into its simple totality, transcending and absorbing back into itself all those marked differences and peculiarities which it evinced when it was still viable."

[10] Lenin, "The Black Hundreds" (1913), *Collected Works*, vol. 19, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/sep/26.htm>.

[11] Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850* (1850), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france/>. Marx wrote, "At that time all the royalists were transformed into republicans and all the millionaires of Paris into workers."

[12] Karl Marx and Frederich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1847–48), Chapter 3, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch03.htm>. Marx and Engels wrote, "In order to arouse sympathy, the aristocracy was obliged to lose sight, apparently, of its own interests, and to formulate their indictment against the bourgeoisie in the interest of the exploited working class alone. Thus, the aristocracy took their revenge by singing lampoons on their new masters and whispering in his ears sinister prophesies of coming catastrophe. In this way arose feudal Socialism: half lamentation, half lampoon; half an echo of the past, half menace of the future; at times, by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeoisie to the very heart's core; but always ludicrous in its effect, through total incapacity to comprehend the march of modern history... Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge. Has not Christianity declaimed against private property, against marriage, against the State? Has it not preached in the place of these, charity and poverty, celibacy and mortification of the flesh, monastic life and Mother Church? Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat." (See also "Linguet," from *Theories of Surplus Value*, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/ch07.htm>.)

[13] Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity — An Incomplete Project," *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 3–15. Habermas wrote, "Thus, for example, neopopulist protests only express in pointed fashion a widespread fear regarding the destruction of the urban and natural environment and of forms of human sociability. There is a certain irony about these protests in terms of neoconservatism. The tasks of passing on a cultural tradition, of social integration and of socialization require adherence to what I call communicative rationality. But the occasions for protest and discontent originate precisely when spheres of communicative action, centered on the reproduction and transmission of values and norms, are penetrated by a form of modernization guided by standards of economic and administrative rationality – in other words, by standards of rationalization quite different from those of communicative rationality on which those spheres depend. But neoconservative doctrines turn our attention precisely away from such societal processes: they project the causes, which they do not bring to light, onto the plane of a subversive culture and its advocates. To be sure, cultural modernity generates its own aporias as well. Independently from the consequences of societal modernization and within the perspective of cultural development itself, there originate motives for doubting the project of modernity. Having dealt with a feeble kind of criticism of modernity – that of neoconservatism – let me now move our discussion of modernity and its discontents into a different domain that touches on these aporias of cultural modernity – issues that often serve only as a pretense for those positions which either call for a postmodernity, recommend a return to some form of premodernity, or throw modernity radically overboard."

[14] Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, trans. Vincent Carfagno (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), 86. Reich wrote, "For the reactionary cultural philosopher there are two possibilities: resignation and skepticism, or turning back of the wheel of history by 'revolutionary' means. But if one has shifted the focal point of one's cultural outlook, has recognized in the collapse of an ancient civilization, not the fall of civilization altogether but merely the fall of a certain civilization, namely the authoritarian, then a natural shifting also takes place in one's assessment of those cultural elements previously appraised as positive or negative. One realizes that the old form is 'laboring with' the new form of civilization, one based on genuine freedom. It is mainly a question of understanding the attitude that the revolution takes toward those phenomena regarded as symptoms of decline by political reaction."

[15] Benito Mussolini, *The Doctrine of Fascism* (1932), available online at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14058/14058-h/14058-h.htm#THE_DOCTRINE_OF_FASCISM>. Mussolini wrote, "The Fascist negation of Socialism, of Democracy, of Liberalism, should not lead one to believe that Fascism wishes to push the world back to where it was before 1879, the date accepted as the opening year of the demo-Liberal century. One cannot turn back. The Fascist doctrine has not chosen De Maistre for its prophet. Monarchical absolutism is a thing of the past, and so is the worship of church power. Feudal privileges and divisions into impenetrable castes with no connection between them, are also 'have beens.' The conception of Fascist authority has nothing in common with the Police. A party that totally rules a nation is a new chapter in history. References and comparisons are not possible. From the ruins of the socialist, liberal and democratic doctrines, Fascism picks those elements that still have a living value; keeps those that might be termed 'facts acquired by history,' and rejects the rest: namely the conception of a doctrine good for all times and all people. Admitting that the Nineteenth Century was the Century of Socialism, Liberalism and Democracy, it is not said that the Twentieth century must also be the century of Socialism, of Liberalism, of Democracy. Political doctrines pass on, but peoples remain. One may now think that this will be the century of authority, the century of the 'right wing' the century of Fascism. If the Nineteenth Century was the century of the individual (liberalism signifies individualism) one may think that this will be the century of 'collectivism,' the century of the State. It is perfectly logical that a new doctrine should utilise the vital elements of other doctrines. No doctrine was ever born entirely new and shining, never seen before. No doctrine can boast of absolute 'originality.' Each doctrine is bound historically to doctrines which went before, to doctrines yet to come. Thus the scientific Socialism of Marx is bound to the Utopian Socialism of Fourier, of Owen, of Saint-Simon; thus the Liberalism of 1800 is linked with the movement of 1700. Thus Democratic doctrines are bound to the Encyclopaedists. Each doctrine tends to direct human activity towards a definite object; but the activity of man reacts upon the doctrine, transforms it and adapts it to new requirements, or overcomes it. Doctrine therefore should be an act of life and not an academy of words. In this lie the pragmatic veins of Fascism, its will to power, its will to be, its position with regard to 'violence' and its value."

[16] Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850*, Part 3.

[17] See V. I. Lenin, "The Cuckoo Praises the Rooster" (1907), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1907/mar/28.htm>.

[18] V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution, 1905–1907" (1907), Chapter 5, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1907/agrprogr/ch01s5.htm#v13pp72-238>.

[19] Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, 3–4.

[20] Lenin, "The Black Hundreds."

[21] Cutrone, "Revolutionary politics and thought."

[22] Friedrich Engels to August Bebel (December 11–12, 1884), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/letters/84_12_11.htm>.

[23] Rosa Luxemburg, *The Socialist Crisis in France* (1901), Part 1, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1901/socialist-crisis-france/ch01.htm>.

[24] Isaac Deutscher, "The Tragedy of the Polish Communist Party" (1958), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/deutscher/1958/polish-tragedy.htm>.

[25] Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution* (1918), Chapter 1, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/ch01.htm>.

[26] V. I. Lenin, "Material for the Preparation of the Programme of the R.S.D.L.P." (1902), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1902/draft/index.htm#04mar07>. See esp. Chapter 4, where Lenin wrote, "If we really knew positively that the petty bourgeoisie will support the proletariat in the accomplishment of its, the proletariat's, revolution it would be pointless to speak of a "dictatorship," for we would then be fully guaranteed so overwhelming a majority that we could get on very well without a dictatorship (as the "critics" would have us believe). The recognition of the necessity for the dictatorship of the proletariat is most closely and inseparably bound up with the thesis of the Communist Manifesto that the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class."

[27] Rosa Luxemburg, "Our Program and the Political Situation" (1918), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/12/31.htm>.

[28] Vernon L. Lidtke, *The Outlawed Party: Social Democracy in Germany*, 1878–1890 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

[29] Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Chapter IX, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/ch09.htm>.

[30] Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880), Part 3, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/ch03.htm>. Engels wrote, "If the crises demonstrate the incapacity of the bourgeoisie for managing any longer modern

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We are the city-building tendency

Caleb T. Maupin

SINCE THE 2008–09 FINANCIAL MELTDOWN, interest in socialism, communism, anarchism, and various anti-capitalist theories have been widespread among the U.S. public. However, this has not manifested itself in a revival of the labor movement or the enactment of social-democratic reforms. Austerity and the march toward a low-wage police state have continued. Regime-change wars and interventions by the Pentagon have continued with even less organized resistance than prior to the financial crash.

The various Marxist-Leninist sects, whose leadership are veterans of the 1960s and 70s political upsurge, remain more isolated than ever. While vague social-democratic concepts about "free healthcare" and "tax the rich" may be more popular today, knowledge of actual Marxist theory is noticeably absent. In this context, feelings of opposition to the status quo, the declining economic situation, the wars and out of touch elected officials have been hijacked by the Right wing. "Populism" is considered to be the property of right-wing nationalists, while "Marxism" is the label put on postmodernists and social-justice theoreticians emerging from the Ivy League schools.

Any serious socialist should be disturbed by this situation, and I certainly have been for a number of years. The biggest awakening came in Zuccotti Park on October 20, 2011, the day the gruesome death of Moammar Gaddafi took place. As an activist in the park, I noticed a big gap among the Occupy Wall Street activists. The seasoned left-wing activists, the Trotskyites, the NGO liberals, and the hipster trust-fund anarchists seemed to view the destruction of Libya in an almost positive light, as a "revolution" against a "dictator" who had "violated human rights."

But among the midwestern, working-class youth, many of whom had come to NYC with almost nothing, there were very different sentiments. Though these youth were ideologically not left-wing, attracted to a mishmash of libertarianism, psuedo-anarchism and conspiracy theories, they viewed Gaddafi in a positive light. They praised Gaddafi's efforts to build up an independent African currency, to build the African Union, and to oppose the U.S. war machine around the world.

While the decaying Marxist-Leninist sect I was working with was attempting to recruit liberal activists, I began to notice and question the ineffectiveness of this strategy. This forced me to examine my own beliefs, my own motivations, and my own ideology, as well as the problems facing the entire leftist milieu in a new light.

Marxism is fundamentally optimistic

In "Critique of the Gotha Programme," Marx explained the material basis for the higher stage of communism, writing:

> In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly — only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs![1]

In essence, Marx is explaining what historical materialism so brilliantly lays out in a way all other analysis cannot. Class society, social hierarchies, and the state itself are all rooted in scarcity. In a society without the all-around development of the individual, where the productive forces and technological progress of human beings is restrained by the irrationality of profits in command, much of the ugliness of the contemporary world becomes unavoidable.

However, Marxism argues that with central planning of the means of production, a post-scarcity society of vast abundance and egalitarianism can emerge. As Engels explained in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*:

> Socialized production upon a predetermined plan becomes henceforth possible. The development of production makes the existence of different classes of society thenceforth an anachronism. In proportion as anarchy in social production vanishes, the political authority of the State dies out. Man, at last the master of his own form of social organization, becomes at the same time the lord over Nature, his own master — free.[2]

As Lenin explained: "Monopolies, oligarchy, the striving for domination and not for freedom, the exploitation of an increasing number of small or weak nations by a handful of the richest or most powerful nations — all these have given birth to those distinctive characteristics of imperialism which compel us to define it as parasitic or decaying capitalism."[3] The essence of Lenin's concept of imperialism as the highest state of capitalism is that development is being restrained. The world is being kept poor so the cartels of Wall Street and London finance, and in our age, the Malthusian social engineers of Silicon Valley can stay rich.

However, when countries have ripped free from the monopolistic domination of western cartels and reorganized their economies, huge successes have resulted. Socialism in the 20th century, despite the flaws and setbacks, demonstrated very clearly that it is capable of rapidly advancing technological progress and development. Russia was an agrarian, impoverished society in 1917. With state central planning, mobilizing the country around five-year plans, overcoming the artificial restraints imposed by the market, the USSR wiped out illiteracy, fully electrified, defeated the Nazi invaders and conquered outer space. The first mobile phone was patented in the Soviet Union in 1957. Despite a NATO treaty barring the USSR from getting access to high technology, crippling economic warfare, and military threat, a home computer system was developed, and all kinds of amazing technological and scientific breakthroughs took place in Soviet society up into the 1980s.

With a Communist Party in power, state-run industries and banks, along with five-year plans and heavy control over the private sector, China has emerged to become the second largest economy in the world. With socialism China has built the largest telecommunications manufacturer, the largest steel industry, and the largest hydroelectric power plant in the world, as well as the fastest trains on the planet. Millions have been raised from poverty, access to education has vastly expanded, and technological achievements and breakthroughs are numerous.

Socialism created a healthcare system in Cuba which is admired all over the world for its achievements. ocialism in Bolivia created the highest GDP growth rates in South America consistently, while paving the roads and wiping out illiteracy. Quality modern housing has been brought to even the poorest Venezuelans. Nicaraguan socialism has eradicated illiteracy and enabled thousands of indigenous people to become micro-entrepreneurs.

With Socialism, Libya was the top oil-exporting country in Africa prior to 2011. It had the highest life expectancy according to the CIA World Factbook and it has constructed the world's largest irrigation system. No horror story of Gaddaffi's atrocities, alleged or truthful, can obscure this economic reality.

While capitalism and more recently, neoliberal economic reforms have left countries across Africa, Central America, and the Caribbean in crippling poverty, socialism turned Russia and China into industrial powerhouses and global superpowers. The endless browbeating of the claim "Socialism never worked! Communism completely failed!" is an effort to obscure, on the basis of human-rights violations, atrocities, and selectively highlighted episodes of mismanagement, the overall, obvious reality. Socialism works, and when countries break free from the imperialist global order, their economic achievements are significant.

This should be no surprise to those who study what Marx and Lenin actually wrote. However, if one listens to prevailing leftist voices in the western world, it can be highly confusing. The vision of a high-tech, post-scarcity world where human beings live out their full potential, what some have called a "resource-based economy," is largely now considered the property of libertarians and other elements who worship the profit motive. The spirit of growth and optimism observed in the Soviet Union by Anna Louise Strong, H.G. Wells, Sydney and Beatrice Webb, W.E.B. Dubois, Albert Einstein and so many other intellectuals is now associated with the Right wing and advocates of the free market.

The "New Left" was fake

Meanwhile, many leftists now focus on the idea that capitalism is bad because it increases consumption. Capitalism is associated with "buying stuff" and "destroying the environment." Leftism is associated with "anti-consumerism" and the notion that the working people of the world should be poorer. Anti-imperialism has been consumed by a narrative best articulated in the Hollywood film *Avatar* (2009). David Brooks summed it up in the *New York Times* as "This is the oft-repeated story about a manly young adventurer who goes into the wilderness in search of thrills and profit. But, once there, he meets the native people and finds that they are noble and spiritual and pure. And so he emerges as their Messiah, leading them on a righteous crusade against his own rotten civilization."[4] In this new narrative that dominates leftism, imperialism is not bad because it holds back economic development, but because it brings it, tearing beautiful primitive peoples away from their spiritually pure ways.

The reason leftism has failed to capture the anger of the U.S. working class in a time of economic crisis is simple. Leftists no longer seek to improve their living conditions, but rather want to reduce them in the name of anti-consumerism and environmentalism. The reason leftists have been some of the most enthusiastic supporters of regime-change wars and destabilization in Syria, Libya, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Russia, and China is because leftism no longer seeks to liberate the developing world from underdevelopment. Leftist narratives now celebrate the Dalai Lama, Wahabbi fanatics, the small minority of indigenous peoples in South and Central America who reject technology, and other groups deemed to be "noble savages" in the white savior fantasy of the ultra-rich. The enemy of such forces is of course the "authoritarian Marxist regimes" that build schools, hospitals, and power plants.

How on earth did anti-consumerism replace the struggle to raise productive forces and living standards with society rationally controlling the means of production? How on earth did the struggle to liberate the developing world from the monopolistic domination and forced poverty at the hands of western finance get replaced with notions similar to Mother Teresa's sickening mantra of "Poverty is Beautiful"?

The answer can be found in Lenin's analysis of the roots of social chauvinism, in the ideological confusion following the fall of the Soviet Union, one factor that cannot be overlooked is the direct intervention of the western intelligence apparatus. The Congress for Cultural Freedom program of the CIA is now a matter of public record. Nominally Left publications, such as *Partisan Review*, *Der Monat*, *Encounter*, *Paris Review*, and others were funded by the CIA along with the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. They highlighted the work of Susan Sontag, Irving Howe, Hannah Arendt, Mary McCarthy, and others. They reinvented leftist thought to be an expression of middle-class alienation and pessimism that labels all populism as "fascist." The so-called "New Left" is a synthetic creation that accompanied the promotion of narcotics with Project MKULTRA, the utilization of various eastern religious cults as proxy forces, and various other criminal activities conducted by the U.S. intelligence agencies. The way U.S. culture was reinvented during the 1960s and 70s was not merely the result of progressive anti-racist struggles and opposition to Cold War conformity, but also the result of sinister efforts to confuse the public and lessen the danger of a real anti-capitalist movement emerging within the United States.

While it is an absolute taboo to discuss in leftist circles, these are facts any serious socialist in the U.S. must acknowledge. The infiltration, manipulation, subsidization of what calls itself "left-wing" in the United States has taken a huge ideological toll, and as a result socialism in the U.S. is in shambles as a few pieces of confused decaying Comintern wreckage scream at a much bigger layer of foundation-funded chaos worshippers and middle-class, academic, anti-social elements. The broad masses of working-class Americans see their living standards falling and are open to anti-capitalist notions, but they look at the destructive entity called "The Left" and want no part of it. They cannot be blamed or morally shamed for doing so.

Where do we go from here?

It may be tempting to become ideologically dogmatic and attempt to restore a more "pure" interpretation of Marxism in light of contemporary distortions, but this would also be a mistake. The Soviet Union collapsed because it could not effectively adjust its socialism in the way countries like Vietnam, Cuba, and China have. The 20th-century socialist countries often fell into the trap of attempting to build a totally egalitarian society in a state of underdevelopment and poverty, having disastrous consequences as seen in China's Cultural Revolution, Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea, and to a lesser degree in many other places.

The truth that Marx laid out in "Critique of the Gotha Programme" is that the entire basis of the communist project is unleashing human creativity and development. According to Engels, this is the very essence of human beings: "the animal merely *uses* its environment, and brings about changes in it simply by its presence; man by his changes makes it serve his ends, *masters* it. This is the final, essential distinction between man and other animals, and once again it is labour that brings about this distinction."[5]

The Center for Political Innovation is not a new Marxist party. Democratic Centralism in the United States has resulted in creating a number of irrelevant sects, none of which can truly call themselves a "party" in the sense of any force worthy of the label. The Center for Political Innovation does not seek to become the new "vanguard" or "leader of the movement." Rather, the Center for Political Innovation is an educational project aiming to get out of the movement and to the masses.

The goals are two-fold:

1. To propose a series of economic and political reforms that would challenge corporate power, and force those who support these demands into confrontation with the profit-centered economic system and its global dominance.
2. To teach genuine, constructive, anti-imperialist, optimistic, scientific socialism to all who want to learn it, facilitating debate and discussion among serious, professional worker-politicians about the concepts and ideology that can lead beyond capitalism and imperialism.

We should not be afraid to question aspects of Marxist theory in order to develop a socialism for our time. The anti-imperialist and socialist movements have changed a lot since the Cold War. Outside of China, much of the socialist- and Marxist-led movements have embraced religious faith, most especially in Latin America. Baathism, socialism with Chinese characteristics, the anti-capitalism of Shia Muslims in the Middle East, African Socialism, and Bolivarianism all reinvented socialism for their own particular country and unique circumstances. Serious revolutionaries in the U.S. should be actively determining how this can be done here, and what will ultimately be the nature of a socialism with American characteristics.

Marx's ending to the *Communist Manifesto* contains the following instructions: "In short, the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things. In all these movements, they bring to the front, as the leading question in each, the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time."[6]

Americans who are angry about losing their jobs, seeing their communities destroyed by opioids, their children locked up in prisons for profit, and their relatives sent off to die in foreign wars must be confronted with the property question. It should be made clear that instead of a weak corporate regime that presides over gradually collapsing the U.S. into just another trading outpost for a global low-wage empire, another option exists.

The U.S. could instead have a government of action that fights for working families. Such a government would mobilize popular power and restructure the U.S. economy to serve public good, putting banking and natural resources under public ownership and management, while enacting an economic bill of rights for the population. It would see the population not as a dangerous mob to be managed but as a reservoir of potential to be unleashed toward building a post-scarcity world of abundance, freedom, and equality.

Amid the ideological confusion and increasing hopelessness of U.S. society, we consider ourselves to be representing the City-Building Tendency within the human species, and our roots go much deeper than Marx. Socrates, Confucius, Christ, Caesar, Spartacus and so many other courageous progressive individuals have given their lives to advancing humanity toward a higher state of being. We are an association of like-minded thinkers and dedicated agitators, cooperating in different ways in different communities across the country.

Those aligned with us deliver bottled water to impoverished families and the elderly in Texas, clean graveyards, operate within church congregations, on college campuses, in workplaces and neighborhoods. We distribute buttons that say "Cancel Student Debt" in NYC parks, conduct regular reading groups in Chicago and California, travel to anti-imperialist countries, appear on international television, hold debates with political opponents, publish books, and much more. Our goal is to help every participant in our project to discover what their own unique contribution can be when taking up history's challenge. We want you to fulfill your potential as a revolutionary, and our organizations exist, not to hold you back and glorify our leaders, but to unleash you to your highest possible achievement.

We reject Left adventurism and like all responsible revolutionary organizers we advocate a peaceful, democratic transition to socialism. We recognize that as capitalism enters a crisis, the ruling classes often move to abolish democratic rights in order to preserve their power. We recognize the people's right to defend their organizations and communities in such a context. However, we are absolutely clear that we want peace and stability, not chaos. It is capitalism that is destroying the United States of America, and socialism will rescue it, rebuilding the country on new foundations, overcoming the legacy of colonialism, slavery, and many other crimes that hang over this society as a curse.

The Center for Political Innovation, its youth organization Students and Youth for a New America, and its cadre outreach team the John Brown Volunteers are open to engaging with all who are willing to discuss and wrangle with how this important project can be carried out. It is in this spirit of open debate and seeking to forge groundbreaking discourse that this article has been submitted to the *Platypus Review*. **|P**

[1] Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme" (1875), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/index.htm>.

[2] Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/>.

[3] Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916–17), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/>.

[4] David Brooks, "The Messiah Complex," *New York Times*, January 7, 2010.

[5] Friedrich Engels, "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man," *Die Neue Zeit*, May–June 1876, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1876/part-played-labour/>.

[6] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1847–48), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/index.htm>.

"What can one learn from the Right?" cont. from page 3

productive forces, the transformation of the great establishments for production and distribution into joint-stock companies, trusts, and State property, show how unnecessary the bourgeoisie are for that purpose. All the social functions of the capitalist has no further social function than that of pocketing dividends, tearing off coupons, and gambling on the Stock Exchange, where the different capitalists despoil one another of their capital. At first, the capitalistic mode of production forces out the workers. Now, it forces out the capitalists, and reduces them, just as it reduced the workers, to the ranks of the surplus-population, although not immediately into those of the industrial reserve army."

[31] Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1 (1867), Chapter 15, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch15.htm>.

[32] Murray Rothbard, Preface to Gustave de Molinari, *The Production of Security* (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1977).

[33] See John Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government* (1690), Chapter V: Of Property, available online at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7370/7370-h/7370-h.htm#CHAPTER_V>.

[34] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (1762), Book 1, Part IX, available online at <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/46333/pg46333-images.html#CHAPTER_IX>. Rousseau wrote, "Each member of the community gives himself to it, at the moment of its foundation, just as he is, with all the resources at his command, including the goods he possesses. This act does not make possession, in changing hands, change its nature, and become property in the hands of the Sovereign; but, as the forces of the city are incomparably greater than those of an individual, public possession is also, in fact, stronger and more irrevocable, without being any more legitimate, at any rate from the point of view of foreigners. For the State, in relation to its members, is master of all their goods by the social contract, which, within the State, is the basis of all rights; but, in relation to other powers, it is so only by the right of the first occupier, which it holds from its members."

[35] Murray Rothbard, *Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature, and Other Essays* (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2000), 96. Rothbard wrote, "A theory of justice must be arrived at which goes beyond government allocations of property titles, and which can, therefore, serve as a basis for criticizing such allocations…This theory has two fundamental premises: 1) the absolute property right of each individual in his own person, his own body; this may be called the right of self-ownership; and 2) the absolute right in material property of the person who first finds an unused material resource and then in some way occupies or transforms that resource by the use of his personal energy. This might be called the homestead principle — the case in which someone, in the phrase of John Locke, has 'mixed his labour' with an unused resource."

[36] Murray Rothbard, *Man Economy and State*, Scholar's Edition, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2009), 103. Rothbard wrote, "it is well to recall the reason for exchange—the fact that each individual values more highly the good he gets than the good he gives up. This fact is enough to eliminate the fallacious notion that, if Crusoe and Jackson exchange 5,000 berries for one cow, there is some sort of "equality of value" between the cow and the 5,000 berries. Value exists in the valuing minds of individuals, and these individuals make the exchange precisely because for each of them there is an inequality of values between the cow and the berries. For Crusoe the cow is valued more than the 5,000 berries; for Jackson it is valued less. Otherwise, the exchange could not be made. Therefore, for each exchange there is a double inequality of values, rather than an equality, and hence there are no "equal values" to be "measured" in any way."

[37] See The Platypus Historians Group, "Friedrich Hayek and the legacy of Milton Friedman: Neo-liberalism and the question of freedom (In part, a response to Naomi Klein)," *Platypus Review* 8 (November 2008), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2008/11/01/friedrich-hayek-and-the-legacy-of-milton-friedman-neo-liberalism-and-the-question-of-freedom/>.

[38] See "Beware the Liberal Union Busters!" (1968) reprinted in *Worker's Vanguard* 956, April 9, 2010, available online at <https://www.icl-fi.org/english/wv/956/ysp-1968.html> and "Teachers' Strike," *Spartacist East* 1 (April 1968).

[39] See Peter Kropotkin, *Conquest of Bread* (1892), available online at <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-kropotkin-the-conquest-of-bread>. See esp. Chapters 3, 11, and 12.

[40] See Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism* (1899), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bernstein/works/1899/evsoc/index.htm>. See esp. Chapter 3(b).

[41] See V. I. Lenin, *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It* (1917), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/ichtci/04.htm#v25zz99h-333>. See esp. Chapter IV, where Lenin wrote, "But however much they do plan, however much the capitalist magnates calculate in advance the volume of production on a national and even on an international scale, and however much they systematically regulate it, we still remain under capitalism–at its new stage, it is true, but still capitalism, without a doubt. The "proximity" of such capitalism to socialism should serve genuine representatives of the proletariat as an argument proving the proximity, facility, feasibility, and urgency of the socialist revolution, and not at all as an argument for tolerating the repudiation of such a revolution and the efforts to make capitalism look more attractive, something which all reformists are trying to do."

[42] Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), Part VII, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch07.htm>.

[43] Karl Marx, "The French Crédit Mobilier," *The People's Paper* 214, June 7, 1856, available in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 15, and online at <http://marxengels.public-archive.net/en/ME0978en.html>.

[44] E.g., Mariame Kaba, "Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police," *New York Times*, June 12, 2020.

[45] V. I. Lenin, "'Left-Wing' Childishness" (1918), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/may/09.htm>.

[46] Max Horkheimer. "The Authoritarian State." *Telos* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1973): 3–20.

[47] E.g., Michael Lind, "The New Class War," *American Affairs* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2017), available online at <https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2017/05/new-class-war/>.

[48] V. I. Lenin, "The Junius Pamphlet" (1916), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jul/junius-pamphlet.htm>.

[49] André Gortz, "from Strategy for Labor" (1964), in *The New Left Reader*, ed. Carl Ogelsby (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1969), 48–49.

[50] V. I. Lenin, "Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?" (1917), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/oct/01.htm>. Lenin wrote, "Capitalism has created an accounting apparatus in the shape of the banks, syndicates, postal service, consumers' societies, and office employees' unions. Without big banks socialism would be impossible. The big banks are the "state apparatus" which we need to bring about socialism, and which we take ready-made from capitalism; our task here is merely to lop off what capitalistically mutilates this excellent apparatus, to make it even bigger, even more democratic, even more comprehensive. Quantity will be transformed into quality. A single State Bank, the biggest of the big, with branches in every rural district, in every factory, will constitute as much as nine-tenths of the socialist apparatus. This will be country wide book-keeping, country-wide accounting of the production and distribution of goods, this will be, so to speak, something in the nature of the skeleton of socialist society."

[51] See Lukács's discussion of Weber and Bureaucracy in "The Phenomenon of Reification," in "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in *History and Class Consciousness*, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/Lukács/works/history/hcc05.htm>.

[52] Woodrow Wilson, *The New Freedom* (1912), available online at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14811/14811-h/14811-h.htm>.

[53] Woodrow Wilson, "The Study of Administration," *Political Science Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (June 1887): 197–222.

[54] Eugene Debs, "Interview with James Creelman of the *New York Journal*" (1897), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/debs/works/1897/970618-debs-interviewwithcreelman.pdf>. Debs said, "Thomas Jefferson lived in other times [he said]. There was a chance for individual competition in his day, but the invention of labor-saving machinery and the organization of trusts have filled the country with hundreds and thousands of idle and homeless men. Labor strikes are useless. I have had experience enough to say that. They are simply force against [illegible] and the trusts and cooperation [illegible] to beat the men in the end. The [illegible] of the people is intolerable. Unless something is done at once to restore the social, economic, and industrial balance there will be widespread disorder and armed resistance. Men and women will not starve in a land of plenty. Go where you will in the United States and you can hear the muttering of the great storm. The Social Democracy of America is trying to find a peaceful solution. We are not making war on millionaires. We are simply trying to build up the people."

[55] Friedrich Engels to Eduard Bernstein (November 30, 1881), in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Volume 46: Letters 1880–83, 152.

[56] Alex Press. "On the Origins of the Professional-Managerial Class: An Interview with Barbara Ehrenreich," *Dissent*, October 22, 2019, available online at <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/on-the-origins-of-the-professional-managerial-class-an-interview-with-barbara-ehrenreich>.

[57] Leon Trotsky, "The USSR in War" (1939), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1939/09/ussr-war.htm>.

[58] Leon Trotsky, "Letter to James P. Cannon" (September 12, 1939), in *In Defense of Marxism: Against the Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in the Socialist Workers Party*, 4th ed. (Pathfinder Press, 1995), 46, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/idom/dm/01-cannon1.htm>. Trotsky wrote, "3. Who says that the USSR is no more a degenerate workers' state, but a new social formation, should clearly say what he adds to our political conclusions. 4. The USSR question cannot be isolated as unique from the whole historic process of our times. either the Stalin state is a transitory formation, it is a deformation of a workers' state in a backward and isolated state, or "bureaucratic collectivism" (Bruno R., La Bureaucratisation du Monde, Paris 1939) is a new social formation, which is replacing capitalism throughout the world (Stalinism, Fascism, New Deals, etc.). The terminological experiments (workers' state, not workers' state; class, not class; etc.) receive a sense only under this historic aspect. Who chooses the second alternative admits, openly or silently, that all the revolutionary potentialities of the world proletariat are exhausted, that the socialist movement is bankrupt, and that the old capitalism is transforming itself into "bureaucratic collectivism" with a new exploiting class."

[59] Dustin Guastella and Jared Abbot, "A Socialist Party in Our Time?" *Catalyst Journal* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2019), available online at <https://catalyst-journal.com/2019/10/a-socialist-party-in-our-time>.

[60] Amber Frost, "Flakes Alive! On Not Attending the Left Forum," *The Baffler*, June 12, 2015, available online at <https://thebaffler.com/latest/flakes-alive>.

[61] Penn Kemble, "The New Politics and the Democrats," *Commentary* (December 1972), available online at <https://www.commentary.org/articles/penn-kemble/the-new-politics-the-democrats/>.

[62] Ibid.

[63] See Boris Kagerlitsky, "Who's afraid of Donald Trump?," *Platypus Review* 88 (July–August 2016), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2016/07/11/afraid-donald-trump/>.

[64] Publius Decius Mus [Michael Anton], "The Flight 93 Election," *Claremont Review of Books*, September 5, 2016, <https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/digital/the-flight-93-election/>.

[65] Cf. *Arguing the World*, directed by Joseph Dorman (Riverside Film Productions, 1997).

[66] Chris Cutrone, "Why I wish Hillary had won: Distractions of anti-Trump-ism," *Platypus Review* 108 (July–August 2018), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2018/07/30/why-i-wish-hillary-had-won-distractions-of-anti-trump-ism/>.

[67] Brendan Cooney, "Left-Trumpists: The Reactionary Case of Chris Cutrone," *With Sober Senses*, June 2, 2018, available online at <https://www.marxisthumanistinitiative.org/resistance-to-trumpism-2/left-trumpists-the-reactionary-case-of-chris-cutrone.html>.

[68] Elias Friedman, "Why not Biden? A response to Chris Cutrone and the Platypus Affiliated Society," *Platypus Review* 128 (July 2020), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2020/07/01/why-not-biden/>.

[69] Chris Cutrone, "Ends of philosophy," *Platypus Review* 108 (July–August 2018), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2018/07/30/ends-of-philosophy/>.

[70] V. I. Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (1920), esp. Chapter 4, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch04.htm>.

[71] Ludwig von Mises, "Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth" (1920), available online at <https://mises.org/library/economic-calculation-socialist-commonwealth>.

[72] Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 44. Hayek wrote, "[…] I recognize that the hot socialism against which [Road to Serfdom] was mainly directed — that organized movement toward a deliberate organization of economic life by the state as the chief owner of the means of production — is nearly dead in the Western world. The century of socialism in this sense probably came to an end around 1948. Many of its illusions have been discarded even by its leaders, and elsewhere as well as in the United States the very name has lost much of its attraction. Attempts will no doubt be made to rescue the name for movements which are less dogmatic, less doctrinaire, and less systematic. But an argument applicable solely against those clear-cut conceptions of social reform which characterized the socialist movements of the past might today well appear as tilting against windmills. Yet though hot socialism is probably a thing of the past, some of its conceptions have penetrated far too deeply into the whole structure of current thought to justify complacency. If few people in the Western world now want to remake society from the bottom according to some ideal blueprint, a great many still believe in measures which, though not designed completely to remodel the economy, in their aggregate effect may well unintentionally produce this result. And, even more than at the time when I wrote this book, the advocacy of policies which in the long run cannot be reconciled with the preservation of a free society is no longer a party matter. That hodgepodge of ill-assembled and often inconsistent ideals which under the name of the Welfare State has largely replaced socialism as the goal of the reformers needs very careful sorting-out if its results are not to be very similar to those of full-fledged socialism."

[73] Brandon Turner, "Marxism vs Welfarism," *Learn Liberty*, April 12, 2017, available online at <https://new.learnliberty.org/videos/marxism-vs-welfarism/>.

[74] Antony Davies and James R. Harrigan, "Transferism, not Socialism, Is the Drug Americans Are Hooked On," *Foundation for Economic Education*, December 6, 2019, available online at <https://fee.org/articles/transferism-not-socialism-is-the-drug-americans-are-hooked-on/>.

[75] Brian Domitrovic, "Millennials Are Teaching Us That Marx Is Unnoticeable," *Forbes*, March 24, 2019, available online at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/briandomitrovic/2019/03/24/millennials-are-teaching-us-that-marx-is-unnoticeable/?sh=475b7d6c6b70>.

[76] Murray Rothbard, "Toward a Strategy for Libertarian Social Change" (1977), available online at <http://www.davidmhart.com/liberty/AmericanLibertarians/Rothbard/Strategy/1977TowardStrategyLibertarianSocialChange.html>.

[77] Murray Rothbard, "Left and Right: The Prospects for Liberty," *Left and Right* (Spring 1965): 4–22, available online at <https://mises.org/library/left-and-right-prospects-liberty>.

[78] Rothbard, "Toward a Strategy."

[79] Platypus Affiliated Society, "Statement of Purpose" (2007), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/project/statement-of-purpose/>.

Paths to Marxism

Chris Cutrone

MY PRINCIPAL TEACHERS IN MARXISM were the Spartacist League, Adolph Reed and Moishe Postone — Theodor Adorno was also a crucial teacher, through his writings, which Reed had pointed me towards when we met up in Chicago after I graduated from college. The title of this essay is an homage to Adolph's own "Paths to Critical Theory," which narrates his political and theoretical coming to consciousness. I first met Reed when I was in college at Hampshire, in the same entering class as his son Touré, and when I was already a member of the Spartacus Youth Club, the youth group of the orthodox Trotskyist Spartacist League.

High school

I had previously considered myself to be a "Marxist" after having read the *Communist Manifesto* and other random, miscellaneous writings by Marx (also Ernest Mandel's *Revolutionary Marxism Today*) in high school. I had been equivocal about the Russian Revolution and Lenin, but felt predisposed towards respecting Trotsky as a dissident figure — I had been taught not only George Orwell's *1984* but *Animal Farm* as well: Emmanuel Goldstein and Snowball were sympathetic if tragic figures. But it was really Marx who got me.

I was a "Leftist" activist in high school during the 1980s, protesting against local anti-black racism (housing discrimination) and in solidarity with Central American movements and the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa. I was surrounded by Catholic Worker, Quaker (American Friends Service Committee) and Secular Humanist adult activists on Long Island, but I occasionally encountered "Marxist" Leftist organizations at demonstrations in New York City. My family was apolitical or otherwise conservative. Of all my friends, only one had any "Leftist" background of any kind: his parents were Irish immigrants of the Catholic Worker Liberation Theology variety and his older sister supplied us with "Left" literature as well as music listening recommendations (Depeche Mode, New Order, et al).

In my solidarity work on Central America and South Africa, I met émigré refugee militants who told me melancholically that "socialism is impossible" because "American workers voted for Ronald Reagan."

College

By the time I was applying to college, my high school boyfriend discovered Hampshire College, to which we both applied and attended together. It was during our first year that we met the Spartacist League at the nearby University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Actually, a mutual friend had first met them and asked us to attend a meeting between them and her, because as "Marxists" we could help her evaluate them: Were they for real? She was unmoved but we were interested and became contacts.

The Spartacist League provided my first real education in Marxism. One of the first things I read by them was their *Lenin and the Vanguard Party* pamphlet from 1978, which greatly impressed me. (My first serious college course paper was on Rosa Luxemburg's critique of Lenin, rebutting the usual anti-Lenin misreadings of Luxemburg.) Soon after, they had me read Cliff Slaughter's 1960 essay "What is revolutionary leadership?," whose oblique reference to Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* I filed for a later date — I had already read Gramsci by that point in college and was intrigued but not exactly convinced by his arguments. Adolph said that the problem with Gramsci was that "he means all things to all people." The Spartacists said simply that Gramsci was a Stalinist.

At this time the Fall of the Berlin Wall and uprisings in Eastern Europe and the USSR were taking place — the Soviet dissident Boris Kagarlitsky was an invited guest speaker at Hampshire College, who I distinctly recall telling me point-blank that there was no point to Marxism which was an outdated ideology of industrialization (when I asked him about this almost 30 years later, he denied ever saying such a thing, he claimed because he never believed it — perhaps it was someone else?).

With the Spartacist League I attended speeches with Q&A discussions by Noam Chomsky and Michael Harrington, with whom I was otherwise not acquainted. The Spartacists' provocative questions from the audience prompted Chomsky and Harrington to articulate their anti-Leninism — their anti-Marxism: Chomsky rehearsed his condemnation of the Bolsheviks for allegedly hijacking and dominating the Russian Revolution; Harrington sarcastically confessed that, yes, he "killed Rosa Luxemburg," with a cynicism that turned me off completely. I later came to respect Harrington more through his writings, and, if not Chomsky himself, at least anarchism to some degree, mostly through the classical writings — I had met Murray Bookchin in high school at New York City's anarchist book store, when he came storming out of the back office to scold me after hearing me ask if they had any books by Lenin: I swear he yelled at me, "Listen, Marxist!"

The Spartacists introduced me to various different social and political realities, through activity in their locals on the East Coast. They had me do various manual labors as proof of my "proletarian" affinities, in addition to selling their newspaper *Workers Vanguard* weekly. For instance, I was required to do my bit cleaning the bathrooms and scrubbing the floors of their fortified international headquarters in New York's financial district, as well as paying regular dues and contributing to various fundraising efforts. They resented my need as a working class student to work in the summer as well as work-study jobs to help pay my tuition and other expenses at Hampshire, asking, "Couldn't your parents just give you the money?" (No, they couldn't.) We attended a strike at the New York *Daily News* newspaper, where a union shop steward carried a pistol openly in his hip holster to defend against scabs, while across the street a police sniper was set up on the roof overlooking the picket line. At a demonstration against something or other in Manhattan, the Borough President Ruth Messinger showed up — the Spartacists pointed her out as a prominent member of the DSA (Democratic Socialists of America): I saw a villain.

The big issues of the day were things like the Crown Heights anti-Semitic riots over a black child struck and killed accidentally by a Hasidic Jewish motorcade, and City College of New York's Professor Leonard Jeffries teaching students that whites were "ice people" and blacks "sun people." A Latino gay Spartacist member with whom I was acquainted was stabbed while selling *WV* on the campus of Howard University by a Nation of Islam supporter, because the Spartacists pointed out that Louis Farrakhan had called for Malcolm X's death after Malcolm had broken with Elijah Muhammad. My friends and I had read Alex Haley's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (as well as Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*) and watched all the *Roots* series on television. Public Enemy and NWA kept the memory alive.

Chris Hani of the South African Communist Party spoke at UMass and said that the "wind of democracy blowing through Eastern Europe should come to South Africa" — upon his return to South Africa a Polish immigrant gunned him down outside his suburban home. I was shocked and appalled by both his speech and his murder. — Later, I would meet Nelson Mandela of the ANC (African National Congress), Jay Naidoo of COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) and other famous anti-Apartheid political figures, when I visited South Africa for their first Gay and Lesbian Film Festival with a delegation of American and British filmmakers, including Isaac Julien, Barbara Hammer and others, in 1994. At a reception dinner, I got Mandela to inform my fellow travelers, who were otherwise drunk on rhetoric, that the end of Apartheid in South Africa was "not a revolution," which anyhow would only provoke a civil war and U.S. invasion. At the time, Mandela's ANC was engaged in fierce bloody street battles against Chief Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party of Zulu nationalists. I was critical but sympathetic to Mandela: at least he didn't lie.

I met Adolph Reed when he visited Hampshire, as back then he was not so far away in New Haven at Yale. I had written to him in response to an op-ed in Long Island's *Newsday* I read on the problem of black student activists' demands on campus — at first, I had no idea he was a Marxist, though the Spartacists informed me that he was and spoke admiringly of his work. Adolph wrote back and said we could meet when he next came up to Hampshire.

I had read Horkheimer and Adorno's "The Culture Industry" chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in a Media Studies course at Hampshire, but it didn't leave much impression on me — I was much more influenced by Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams in that context. It wasn't until after I graduated that I started reading the Frankfurt School in earnest, and not until I was a graduate art student in Chicago that I read Adorno's writings with any seriousness — in order for Adorno to help defend my Marxism against the postmodernism I was encountering for the first time: my Hampshire professor Margaret Cerullo, a friend of Adolph Reed and editor of the legacy SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) journal *Radical America*, had said to me discouragingly that, while her education was in Marxism (she later told me when applying for graduate study that "the Frankfurt School is like a second skin" to her, but no one was interested anymore, so why would I want to pursue such things?), perhaps now Foucault was more relevant; and anyway weren't the Spartacists an FBI COINTELPRO operation?

Adolph Reed spoke on campus and made a special visit to my class taught by Margaret Cerullo and Carollee Bengelsdorf. The following week after Adolph spoke, some (white) students in class complained about him as an "African-American who was interested in an obscure 19th century Jewish philosopher (Marx)." When my professors failed to challenge this, saying, "That's a good question," I stood up to defend both Adolph and Marx, shouting, "No, it's not!"

The anti-war movement around the Gulf War U.S. intervention against the Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait was a key moment for me. The utter futility of the protests, which were met by counter-protesters with lurid signage against "Sodom Insane" (Iraqi Baathist leader Saddam Hussein) charging anti-war marchers with American flagpoles wielded as weapons, seemingly permitted to pass through police lines to do so, left me dejected as President George H.W. Bush declared, unhindered, the "New World Order."

By the time I graduated from Hampshire in 1993, I was done with the "Left" — but not with Marxism. Events of my final year in 1992 — the "Left" protesting of the quint-centenary of the Columbian Discovery, the Los Angeles riots against the acquittal of the police who beat Rodney King that the "Left" called a "rebellion," and the election of William Jefferson Clinton after 12 years of Republican Presidents, which was met with jubilation by my fellow "Left" students as well as by our "Leftist" professors at Hampshire — convinced me that my moment was not apt for Marxism or socialism. I was depressed that the world seemed forever frozen and stuck in a dead-end 1960s New Left framework that I could not abide. During the Rodney King protests, I witnessed black students take over an administration building at Hampshire, but proceed to kick out first the white students, then the non-black students of color and finally the black women for supposedly not sharing the plight of black men's abuse by police. When soon afterwards the Spartacists decided to try to "break" me with accusations of "petit bourgeois intellectualism," I had had enough.

Richard Rubin, an acquaintance from the Hampshire Spartacus Youth Club chapter, and I kept alive the idea of trying to carry on the Spartacists' outlook without their organizational insularity and paranoia: we toyed with the idea of starting a "Leviné League," named after the martyr of the 1919 Bavarian Workers Republic, Eugen Leviné, but it amounted to nothing. All the former Hampshire Spartacus Youth members I had recruited except me and Richard scattered to the wind. We maintained our subscriptions to *Workers Vanguard*. I dutifully checked in with the Chicago local — and reunited with Richard, who had always kept his distance from the Spartacist as an avowed heterodox "Menshevik Centrist" — when I moved there. But I settled depoliticized into the 1990s Clinton regime, struggling to make my way in the world as a young adult.

Chicago

I became a video artist and publicly continued to avow and promulgate my Marxism — mostly through quotations from Adorno's cultural-critical writings in artist statements — but this made me into more of a curiosity than a militant ideologue in the art world. I met the poet Reginald Shepherd, who was the first to recommend Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (as well as his *Notes to Literature*) to me — Adolph had recommended *Negative Dialectics*, *Minima Moralia* and *Prisms*. Reginald told me that Adorno would cure me of my Marxism, but ended up only confirming it — and deepening it. I became convinced I had to read everything by Adorno — eventually, I realized I must write a dissertation on Adorno, on his Marxism.

Eventually, I earned first my Master of Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) and my Masters and PhD from the University of Chicago, launching my teaching career, first as a graduate student, and then thereafter, up to the present.

At SAIC, I studied in the Video Department, which was staffed with avowedly "Marxist" professors, one of whom had made a documentary on Mumia Abu-Jamal that the Spartacists used to promote Mumia's case. — I recall vividly attending with the Spartacists a "Free Mumia!" rally in Philadelphia, which was denounced by the local Fraternal Order of Police head, who said on TV that we protesters should be put on an "electric couch" to join in Mumia's execution. But my art work was accused of being "too aesthetic" by my professors and fellow students at SAIC. The separate Film Department was also staffed by "Marxist" filmmakers but was regarded by the Video Department as being too interested in art as opposed to "politics." But I knew the difference between politics and art.

During this time of the mid-1990s, I met and became friends with the up-and-coming "New / Post-Black Black Artists" such as Isaac Julien, Glenn Ligon and others, as well as meeting the faculty at the new Harvard University department organized by Henry Louis Gates Jr., such as Cornel West, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Paul Gilroy, Homi Bhabha and others — including meeting Stuart Hall on a visit — when Isaac Julien was teaching there (in New York, Isaac introduced me to bell hooks, who objected to my existence). As an artist, I spoke individually and on panels about — dissenting against — racial and sexual identity, at film festivals, art museums and galleries, and colleges and universities around the world.

Many conversations about Marxism were had: the consensus was that it was finished.

Back in Chicago, I was living through the brunt of neoliberal capitalism. I participated marginally in Adolph's anti-Clintonite Labor Party USA organizing, meeting his local colleagues in the venture (mostly Maoist labor union activists). I made my skepticism about the Labor Party clearly known to Adolph, and suggested that we should be working towards a socialist party instead. He said that I sounded like the "Trotskyite sectarians" he was struggling against in the Labor Party — the ISO (International Socialist Organization), Solidarity, and others — and accused me of being "too abstractly theoretical" in my politics. The Labor Party USA project seemed to me to be just Democrats dissenting against Clintonism. He was opposed to running Labor Party candidates against Democrats — he didn't want to be a spoiler. Nonetheless, he called for voting for the Green Party's Ralph Nader against Al Gore for President in 2000 — and regretted it ever since. Adolph amused me driving around Chicago: just missing an open parking space, he would exclaim, "Racist yuppies!" He introduced me through the Labor Party activities in Chicago to his then-girlfriend, Stephanie Karamitsos, a PhD student at Northwestern University, with whom I bonded as a fellow artist, reading and discussing Adorno widely and at great length.

Adolph is a follower of the later "council communist" Karl Korsch and of thinkers who were students of the later Lukács such as Istvan Meszaros and others such as Karel Kosik, whose book *Dialectics of the Concrete* Adolph opposed to the alleged bad "idealism" of the Frankfurt School. Both the later Korsch and Lukács had turned away from their Hegelian Marxism circa 1917 towards "materialism." In Korsch's case this meant turning against Lenin and ultimately against Marxism as a whole — including Marx — because of their alleged "bourgeois elitism and vanguardism" contra the working class. Adolph disliked Trotskyism on this basis. He worked out a very elaborate argument concerning this issue in his book on W.E.B. Du Bois on which he was working when I was in my period of closest contact with him.

Adolph ascribed my resistance to his Labor Party USA project to my supposed "abstract idealism" that he attributed to my Trotskyism and strong affinity for Adorno. It was precisely Adorno who, in his *Negative Dialectics*, had helped me sort out the vexed issue of "materialism vs. idealism" in Marxism, which he taught me to see as a historical symptom of the defeat of the revolution rather than a matter of ahistorical principle as Adolph and others did. There was no need to raise the failure of Lenin and Trotsky to achieve socialism through the Russian Revolution to a matter of principle; indeed, Adorno taught me that it was important to remember them and Marxism against the grain of subsequent history, as an important attempt not easily explained away.

In addition to working various odd jobs — for instance at Kinko's photocopy shop, where I met a couple of young Zapatista militants visiting Chicago who came in with literature to print, and including as support staff for engineers at the local Shure Electronics factory, drafting assembly-line instructions for workers (mostly Mexican women) there as well as at their sister location across the border in Juarez — I taught film and video production to aspiring workers in the media industry at Columbia College in Chicago.

Meanwhile, local "Leftist" activists were protesting against "big box stores" such as Borders Books and Walmart, Target, et al, trying to defend local businesses from them — I saw them rather as opportunities for organizing — and shopping — for the working class. Adolph said of mom-and-pop stores that "exploitation begins at home." Cynical city aldermen would hire insta-crowds to picket the stores. I encountered race-baiting at the NGO level with local arts and media "Left" organizations descended from the 1970s–80s post-New Left cultural activist scene, which lost their government funding and, seeking private foundation support, were attacked for being too "white" — and promptly confessed their guilt and disappeared, leaving a void artistically, culturally and politically. It was the end of an era.

At the time of the O.J. Simpson trial, Adolph pointed out that single cases never serve well as rallying-points politically because the facts are always complicated and reality is not symbolic or allegorical, though the capitalist politicians and news media try to make it so. About Simpson himself, Adolph observed that "even a guilty man can be framed" and the police frame people, innocent or guilty, routinely. O.J. was found not guilty, though he was not innocent. I learned later as a victim of crime that the trial court, if not the criminal justice system as a whole, exists — at least ostensibly — for the benefit of the accused defendant against the state — as it should be. The police are there not to protect society against crime but to enforce the law; and prosecutors try to win cases, not achieve justice — which cannot be found in court anyway, especially not in capitalism. A bitter truth, but true nonetheless. — Life is not a morality play.

Graduate school

At the University of Chicago, I again met my Irish-American high school friend, who was then finishing his PhD in Musicology, writing a dissertation on Weimar Republic popular music, and who told me that a German professor had said that unless one is a native German language speaker one can never truly understand Adorno. He studied German, found a German boyfriend and relocated there, claiming his Irish citizenship in the EU. Before parting, he warned me against studying with Moishe Postone because Postone didn't tolerate any dissent from his students — I ignored his advice and became Moishe's student anyway. Adolph warned me archly that Moishe was perhaps too "tribal" — a veiled reference to Moishe's (famous, but as-yet unknown to me) criticisms of Palestinian solidarity and "anti-Zionist Leftism." For his part, Moishe said that, while he appreciated Adolph's work a great deal, he found it too "angular:" Moishe couldn't countenance Adolph's fierce criticisms of black Democrat politicians.

Before studying with Moishe, I first took Adolph's friend Kenneth Warren's courses in African-American literary history and theory at the University of Chicago, and Ken became one of my advisors, eventually serving as my dissertation chair. My dissertation was on Adorno, and when a professor, editor of a prestigious critical theory journal, heard my subject of study, he exclaimed, incredulously, "I didn't know Adorno was gay!," to which I replied that as far as I knew he wasn't — I certainly hoped he wasn't. Who knows what he thought of Ken chairing my committee?

I started out as an Art History — Media Studies — student, and earned the ire of the department chair when I corrected a fellow student's misreading of Walter Benjamin's essay on "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" as a culturally conservative rejection of modern mass media rather than a dialectical critique, which the chair blamed me for the student, the one black member of our cohort, eventually dropping out — he cut me from the program as punishment. Or perhaps it was for another reason: when discussing my Masters thesis on Benjamin, the chair chastised me that Lenin and Trotsky relished "killing the innocent as well as the guilty" — I learned later that he was an ex-Marxist.

At Univ. Chicago, I took courses with the Hegel scholar Robert Pippin, who had been a member of the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) in the 1960s and became an acolyte of Marcuse when he taught at University of California at San Diego. We conversed in and out of class on issues of German Idealism and Marxism, with Adorno and Benjamin figuring prominently. The question regarding Hegel and Marx was the philosophy of freedom.

The Marxist literary critic Fredric Jameson once replied to a question I posed at a Univ. Chicago event about his account of Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* — that perhaps it was about freedom and not merely happiness — that "freedom is a Right-wing concept." Adolph responded to my question in a graduate student colloquium he co-taught with Ken on the history of anti-black racism in the U.S., regarding the issue with the Taft-Hartley Act of official government-recognized labor unions as a historical gain or setback for workers, that "freedom is in the eye of the beholder," a version of the usual Leftist "freedom for who?" dismissal of the question of social freedom — the freedom of society as a whole, over which Marxists such as Lenin and Adorno considered capitalism to be dominating as an impersonal force, affecting all of its members.

As Postone did later, Pippin confessed that he felt he "couldn't really understand" Benjamin and Adorno, which made sense to me as ignorance of the Marxism at the core of their work. Pippin highlighted a sentence in one of my course papers on Marxism about the philosophical difficulty of "recognizing oneself as a subject of change from within the process of self-transformation."

Postone's courses — which I attended with Stephanie and sometimes Richard as outside auditors — on Marx and the Frankfurt School as well as on the post-1960s "Left" criticisms of capitalism, were a welcome respite from the otherwise unrelenting anti-Marxism of postmodernist academia — if however, as I soon came to realize, they were their own form of anti-Marxism. Moishe would say that, while Marx himself was politically a "traditional Marxist," his theoretical work pointed beyond this. When teaching Adorno's work, Moishe confessed that he wasn't sure he really understood it: I replied simply that Adorno was a Marxist; and maybe Marxist politics was more and other than what Moishe thought.

In Moishe's classes, I met a new friend, Spencer Leonard, with whom I immediately engaged on issues of Lenin, Trotsky, the Russian Revolution and historical Marxism more generally. Spencer, Stephanie and I formed a close friendship circle; we were joined by fellow graduate student friends Atiya Khan, Sunit Singh and James Vaughn.

I appreciated the pedagogy in Marx and the Frankfurt School we were receiving from Postone, but felt it all made sense only if one took certain things about Marxism for granted, politically, which Moishe did not and indeed opposed. Still, I was a little shocked when Moishe told me point-blank, angrily, that I was inappropriately trying to reconcile his work with what it was designed precisely against, Marxism — more specifically, Lenin. But it was clear to me that Marx and Lenin wanted to overcome labor as a social relation and not hypostatize it politically, as Postone alleged. James's old Trotskyist professor Robert Brenner (and member of Solidarity) said that Moishe's insights into Marx were nothing new to actual Marxists, and his political apprehensions were misplaced. But I knew that most "Marxists" were exactly what Moishe said they were, not really followers of Marx at all: they were the socialists and communists that Marx himself had critiqued in his day. Marxists had always complained of the constant degeneration into "vulgar" and pseudo-"Marxism" and relapse into pre-Marxian socialism, for instance Luxemburg's critique of reformist Revisionism of Marxism.

Moishe objected to what he called my characterization of "Luxemburg and Lenin as bosom buddies walking arm-in-arm," and was incensed when I produced evidence that Luxemburg spoke and wrote fondly of Lenin and that they were indeed good friends who spent many an evening together, walking arm-in-arm, to which he responded dismissively that, "Of course Luxemburg was a traditional Marxist anyway." Moishe ended up protesting stridently during my dissertation defense on Adorno's Marxism, but relented when I talked him down, admitting, "Perhaps everything ended in 1919, but we're still thinking," to which I replied, "But are we really thinking, Moishe?" Meeting for coffee several weeks later, he said, "You know, Chris, you might have a point about Lenin, but you need to support it better." I thought Lenin supported it best himself.

In any case, I remained independent from Postone in ways that always irritated him and made him distrustful of me. He told others that while he admired that I am "always thinking," he thought that I was, problematically, "once a Spartacist, always a Spartacist." — Here Moishe agreed with Adolph. Nonetheless, Moishe hired me in the College Core Curriculum of the Social Sciences, teaching undergraduates courses on Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Freud for the next decade and a half — until, after Moishe's death, his students were purged from the staff.

When I began teaching Adorno and the Frankfurt School at SAIC, 9/11 had happened and the War on Terror was already underway, and Iraq had been invaded, but the U.S. occupation was facing difficulties, and the anti-war movement was regaining ground. My students attended protests and encountered the "Left" and its "Marxist" organizations, and the effects of this filtered back into my classes, raising many questions.

My students at SAIC and Univ. Chicago asked me to start an extra-curricular reading group in early 2006, wanting me to inform them more explicitly of the political implications of the Marxism I was teaching, outside the academic classroom. I warned them that this would become very intense and very political very quickly. Among the first writings we read together was something recommended to me by Adolph Reed more than a decade earlier, Korsch's 1923 essay on "Marxism and Philosophy." We attended "Left" events as a group, including the first national conference of the new Students for a Democratic Society, held at the University of Chicago in summer 2006. These activities soon led to founding an organization, the Platypus Affiliated Society, in 2007.

The rest is history. **IP**